

Tempe's distracted driving ordinance updated to primary offense

Mobile devices must be operated in hands-free mode while driving

Tempe, Ariz. (March 1, 2019) – On average, it takes five seconds to send or read a text message. It also takes about five seconds to travel the length of a football field while driving 55 mph. In 2016, nine percent of all fatal crashes in the U.S. were reportedly related to in-vehicle distractions.

As part of Tempe's Vision Zero efforts to eliminate traffic fatalities, the City Council approved changes to the city's Distracted Driving Ordinance at last night's Regular Council Meeting.

The original ordinance, passed in 2015, allowed Tempe Police to cite drivers who were posing a risk to others because of the use of a handheld mobile device. They first had to be observed driving erratically.

The new changes, which take effect immediately, allow Tempe Police to cite drivers for holding, typing on or operating a mobile device while driving. Devices must be used in hands-free or voice-operated modes. Removing the distraction associated with handheld mobile devices will allow drivers to better focus attention on driving, resulting in improved safety for all roadway users. There will be a 30-day education period before any citations are issued.

"Studies continue to show that primary distracted driving laws lead to a reduction in traffic fatalities, especially those that are hands-free," said Vice Mayor Lauren Kuby. "The changes that the Tempe Council approved are completely in line with our Vision Zero initiative to reduce traffic fatalities and serious injury crashes to zero. We want to see two hands on the wheel, with the driver focused on driving."

Exceptions to the ordinance include if a driver is using a mobile device while parked on the side of a road, stopped at a railroad crossing or at a red light.

Penalties for each offense will stay the same. For the first offense, drivers are subject to a \$100 fine plus penalty. Second incidents will result in a \$250 fine plus penalty and repeated incidents within a 24-month period will incur a \$500 fine plus penalty.

Several legislative bills regarding distracted driving and texting while driving have been proposed at the state level. If a bill is adopted, it could stop the enforcement of any city-specific ordinances in Arizona in favor of local enforcement of the state law.

For more information about Vision Zero, please visit tempe.gov/VisionZero.

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